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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 QUITO 000874

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [EC](#)

SUBJECT: ECUADOR: STREETS CALM, GUTIERREZ SAFE, PALACIO SPEAKS

REF: A. QUITO 872

[1B](#). QUITO 871

[1C](#). QUITO 870

[11](#). (U) SUMMARY: Providential rains cooled demonstrators' temperatures and cleared Quito streets late April 20, although additional protests focusing on Congress are likely April 21. The Ecuadorian Red Cross is claiming two dead, more than 300 injured (mainly from tear gas) since mass demonstrations began a week ago. Media reports that ex-President Lucio Gutierrez has holed up in the residence of the Brazilian ambassador, with Brasilia soon to grant him political asylum. Police continue their search for former administration officials and PRE leader Abdala Bucaram. With police and armed forces assistance, President Alfredo Palacio at 1900 hrs departed the site of the alternative Congressional session and proceeded to the Joint Command HQ in southern Quito, where he delivered his first presidential press conference. Highlights included Palacio's stated intention to foment "direct democracy" in Ecuador, govern constitutionally, and not dissolve Congress or call immediate elections (although he will seek the public's opinion on the next vote's timing). "I am Ecuador's last hope," he boasted. END SUMMARY.

Security

[12](#). (U) Despite Congress having dismissed Gutierrez and installed Palacio as president, crowds attempted to penetrate both the Congressional building, where pro-GoE delegates worked, and the CIESPAL facility in north Quito, where opposition Congressman had established a "rebel" session. Police at the former prevented a breach, but some 3-4000 demonstrators were crowding the entrance to CIESPAL as late as 1830 hrs, demanding complete dissolution of Congress. Embassy contacts told us approximately 30 legislators and Palacio were trapped inside. Rains intensified, however, dispersing the crowds, and the eventual arrival of GoE security forces allowed the Ecuadorian president and deputies to depart at approximately 1930.

[13](#). (SBU) Inflammatory Quito radio station La Luna overnight broadcasted messages blasting the U.S.-Andean Free Trade Agreement and the USG military presence in Manta, but issued no calls for actions against the Embassy or American citizens. It also called on protesters to return home, "their work done" (Septel will provide background on La Luna). RSO sources indicate sporadic protests will continue April 21, however, the participants mainly hard-core leftists and rabble-rousers. Quito's Red Cross April 21 tabulated the casualty toll from a week of Quito violence at two dead, 360 wounded.

Gutierrez

[14](#). (U) Former President Gutierrez, after a surreal helicopter/airplane/helicopter/car escape, allegedly is holed up in the residence of Brazilian Ambassador Sergio Florencio. Peaceful protesters overnight gathered near the compound, a mile north of the Embassy, but dispersed by early morning; there remains a squad of police protecting the Brazilian mission. Media report that Brasilia intends to grant Gutierrez asylum, although we have heard nothing through official channels. In order to depart the country, the ex-president would require an Ecuadorian MFA-issued "safe conduct" determination, equal to what former FM Patricio Zuquilanda granted former GoE President Gustavo Noboa eighteen months ago. Police continue their manhunt for former Supreme Court President Guillermo Castro, ex-President Abdala Bucaram, and one-time Minister of Social Welfare Bolivar Gonzalez, for whom Ecuador's acting attorney general has issued arrest warrants.

Congress

[15](#). (SBU) Public dissatisfaction with Ecuador's legislature continues. CIESPAL demonstrators attacked Congressional 1st VP Cynthia Viteri (PSC), who earlier had administered Palacio's oath of office, as well as independent Patricio Davila and Pachakutik's Miguel Lopez. Media claimed that, in response to protesters' "throw the bums out" demands, two

deputies allegedly have resigned (we are confirming). On a positive note, Carlos Vallejo (PRIAN), chief of the International Relations Committee and long-time US-hater announced his intention to resign once the political situation stabilizes. One PSC contact told Poloff that Congress would not reconvene until April 26 or 27, while another said the Democratic Left (ID) party would inherit the legislative presidency. There has been no formal Congressional resolution tapping the ID, however.

Government Response

16. (U) At Joint Forces HQ April 20, newly installed President Alfredo Palacio conducted his first press conference; seated with him were Ecuador's military high commanders. Palacio proclaimed his intention to establish "direct democracy" in Ecuador, without elaborating. He would steadfastly honor the constitution, although he was not averse to amending it legally. Palacio was "no dictator"; as such, he would not cave to protesters' demands to dissolve the legislature, believing anarchy would result. Nor would he call immediate elections. "Such an action would benefit the current, corrupt political class," the president asserted. Instead, he would seek a revised electoral law, to be approved via referendum, that included options for the next presidential vote.

17. (U) Palacio had not yet finalized his Cabinet selections (media claim three are in place now), but would consider candidates of any political stripe. His VP "must be intelligent, prepared, and have experience in public service." On issues of USG importance, Palacio did not dismiss out-of-hand the Free Trade Agreement, but claimed Ecuador's negotiating position and team were weak. He did not mention Manta. Concluding the conference, the president pleaded for time to recast and rebuild the nation. "I am Ecuador's last hope," he contended.

Embassy Actions

18. (SBU) The RSO and others continue outreach to their GoE law enforcement and military intelligence counterparts. At 0830 hrs, DAO and Milgroup commander are calling on Joint Forces Chief Victor Rosero to gauge the current situation and urge the military to behave responsibly. Late April 20, PSC leaders Leon Febres-Cordero and Jaime Nebot attempted to reach the Ambassador, urging her to declare the presidential change "constitutional." Seeing a trap, she declined the calls, although she will call Nebot April 21.

Third Party Efforts

19. (U) Media here reported that Venezuela, Chile, Bolivia, Peru, and Argentina had issued statements calling for calm and constitutional order in Ecuador. The local UN mission forwarded us the UNSYG's statement, which tracks closely with ours in its calls for a non-violence and a return to rule of law. We understand the OAS Permanent Council is meeting April 21, and we have forwarded comments to USOAS regarding the U.S. permrep's statement.

Next Steps

10. (SBU) Septel will detail the Embassy's short-term plans for engaging the new government. Broadly, we will seek meetings with the few Palacio Administration officials already named, maintain regular contacts with Ecuadorian security forces, and reach out to important third-party actors, from business leaders and former politicians to academics and heads of NGOs.

KENNEY